

DRAMA

DEC 28 1938

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



CONTENTS

DECEMBER, MCMXXXVIII

PLAYS OF THE MONTH: BY
LIONEL HALE / PROPAGANDA
IN THE THEATRE: BY H. R.
LENORMAND / STUDY YOUR
MAKE-UPS: BY PHILIP B.
BARRY / THE CONFERENCE
AT BOURNEMOUTH / /

ILLUSTRATIONS

6d.

Published by
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
9 FITZROY SQUARE
LONDON
W.1

Irene Mawer

Christmas Course in Mime, Historical and Expressive Movement

Portman Rooms,
Baker Street, W.1
January 2nd to January 6th, 1939

Single Classes or Full Course

For full particulars and fees apply to:—
Miss Joyce Ruscoe,
6, Observatory Gardens, W.8.

*Indispensable to all users of
the Library.*

THE PLAYER'S LIBRARY II

Being the first supplement to
the Catalogue of Books in the
Library of the British Drama
League.

Containing all the Accessions
since April, 1930, and a complete
List of Reading Sets.

Price 2s. 6d.

By Post 2s. 8d.

from:

9, FITZROY SQUARE, LONDON, W.1

MISS WEBBER'S TYPEWRITING OFFICE PLAYS, PARTS, AUTHORS MSS., ETC. VISITING SECRETARIES DUPLICATING

6, Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1.
Telephone: Whitehall 5324.

FASHION AND FORM

A Lecture Demonstration
VALERIE PRENTIS

ENID BARR
RICHARD SOUTHERN
present the subject
Clothes and the Player
from an Unusual Angle

Apply to:
Valerie Prentis, 10, Chisbert St., N.W.8
Primrose 4445

Millicent Fawcett Hall

46, TUFTON ST., WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.

Dramatic Performances : Conferences
Social and Business Meetings : Dances
Accommodation 200

**LARGE STAGE—GOOD LIGHTING
EXCELLENT DRESSING ROOMS**

Refreshments obtainable in Restaurant

*Apply for terms to: The AGENT,
Women's Service Trust,*

Tel: ABBEY 1541

39, Marsham Street, S.W.1

DULCIE BOWIE,

L.R.A.M. (Eloc.), A.R.A.M.

Management of the Voice: Speaking of Poetry & Prose.

Pupils prepared for L.R.A.M. and Associated Board
Examinations.

Classes in Drama and Choral Speaking. Plays Produced.
Lectures. Recitals. Adjudicator at the major Music
Festivals.

49, BARKSTON GARDENS, S.W.5.

Telephone: Froebler 4085.





DRAMA

VOL 17

DECEMBER, MCMXXXVIII

NUMBER 3

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Lionel Hale

OUR theatre—bless its comfortable little heart—really has the most awe-inspiring talent for shutting its eyes to the present.

I have four weeks of the London theatre under review. We live in an age as exciting as any that ever was. The air trembles with Drama. And what mirror does our theatre hold up to all this?

We have had a revival of Mr. Shaw's "Man and Superman," that *démodé* sexual duel, at the Old Vic. We have had a revival of Molière's "Le Malade Imaginaire" at the Apollo, in a bad Victorian translation, and priding itself on the traditional production, which is no production at all. We have had a good, bustling revival of Dekker's "The Shoemaker's Holiday" at the Playhouse, which was jolly, Cockney Elizabethan fun, but which concerns the building of Leadenhall, whereas the problem that busies us in real life is how to prevent, with balloon barrages and A.R.P., the destruction of Leadenhall.

We have had a play about Sir Thomas More, of which an account later. We have had a play about Elizabeth of Austria, a long, crowded affair, full of bygone pomps and pageantries, a conventional uninspired document with theatrical touches of Wild Birds beating their Wings against the Bars of Gilded Cages, a long evening with actors and actresses scurrying down the years in a rapid succession of more and more glittering costumes, and more ageing and more ageing wigs, with only Miss Wanda Rotha's handsome and sensitive playing to redeem the aridity.

We had, at the Gate, a little fancy by Mr. James Laver, "The Heart Was Not Burned,"

in which he imagined Byron, Keats and Shelley saved from their untimely deaths. Mr. Laver intended to turn this into a literary-political fantasy, with Byron as an early Dictator, Keats a Democrat, and Shelley an idealist-pacifist Communist. But his energy failed him; and his play, which had a little promise of mild, political whimsy, wandered indeterminately away.

So much for the past: what of the present scene? There was the very honest small play of a suburban shop-keeper-murderer, "They Fly By Twilight," which belongs to the Little Man school of literature, and is a far better example than most. There was Mr. A. A. Milne's comedy, "Gentleman Unknown," which was very cheerful as long as it was purely flippant about the come-down-in-the-world itinerant salesman of stockings, but grew grievously uninteresting when it tried to make us seriously concern ourselves with the marital problems of this awfully charming but unscrupulous adventurer and his awfully charming and well-behaved young wife.

There was also a piece that by its title promised us a satire on ourselves. It was a baffling impossibility called "So English!"; and it shot off the stage as quickly as it appeared to have shot on to it.

And this is all that happened on the London stage for four weeks: except for one play. This one play to have any reference to 1938 was written by an octogenarian. Its title is "Geneva"; and its author is Mr. George Bernard Shaw.

For two acts, indeed, it is a loitering affair, shambling satirically about the corridors of the offices at Geneva and missing the marks of

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

its satire as often as it hits them. But in the last act Mr. Shaw—does one have to be an octogenarian to be so impudent? Or only to be Mr. Shaw? Or both?—brings his two Dictators, Bombardone and Battler, on to the stage. The discussion between these two has the wild, riotous exactitude of the best burlesque. It is as bland as it is audacious. Mr. Shaw has no business to write like this at his age: it makes our younger authors look timid and tepid. Or are they?

I promised to return to one play I mentioned before, Miss Mona Stuart's play of Sir Thomas More, "Traitor's Gate," at the Duke of York's. This was the most impressive play of these four weeks; and, though it is of the

past, it is of the present, too, for it is the study of the conscience of a man who hates tyranny and who in the end gives up his life rather than connive at what he knows is wrong: rather that is, in his case, than condone the adultery and heresy of Henry VIII.

It is a most moving and intelligent piece of writing, a little too relentless, perhaps, in its last act. But this integrity is rare in our theatre, and must be welcomed.

I find that I have written little of the month's acting. It was, in general, very sound; and I am going to confess that, though I thought Mr. Basil Sydney's performance in "Traitor's Gate" only good, most people found it magnificent.

MR. IVOR BROWN AND "THE WHITE GUARD"

A Letter to the Editor

SIR,

Having for a long time regarded "Drama" as a refreshingly progressive theatrical journal, I was the more astonished to read Mr. Ivor Brown's rude dismissal of M. St. Denis' "much talked-about season" at the Phoenix in last month's issue. It matters little to me what attitude the critic takes if he can justify that attitude. But why does Mr. Brown think that readers of "Drama" can be satisfied with a mouthful of irrelevant generalisations and stock phrases, in place of a straightforward and impartial criticism?

Allow me to quote some of Mr. Brown's more surprising statements. He writes: "Most of the domestic scenes seemed to me so 'School of Chekhov,' the direction so 'School of Stanislavsky,' and the effect so derivative as to be a little disappointing, especially after the amount of publicity which is lavished on the talents of M. St. Denis. Not only in politics do the English love to prostrate themselves in front of foreigners!"

Now as far as I can make out, Mr. Brown is taking exception either to M. St. Denis' use of Stanislavsky's methods in this play, or else to "School of Chekhov" and "School of Stanislavsky" solely on the grounds that they are not of English origin. To the first objection one might answer that, since "The White Guard" is a play of the naturalistic school, who could do better than to follow in the tradition of Stanislavsky? But Mr. Brown is kind enough to offer an alternative suggestion, which is half-a-dozen English producers who could have done the job as well as M. St. Denis, that is, according to Mr. Brown, just as indifferently. To the second objection there is no answer, save that Englishmen with only a mild interest in the development of theatrical art are not ashamed to own their indebtedness to Chekhov and the Moscow Art

Theatre. Strangely enough when Mr. Brown begins to praise "this excellent and harmonious company," and calls attention to "the lead of co-operators, not of exhibitionists," he seems unaware that he is thereby paying a direct compliment to the "regisseur," whose function in the naturalistic theatre is, as we know, indispensable to the unity of the whole.

It seems to me that, in criticisms of this kind, Mr. Brown is not only endangering his own reputation as a dramatic critic, but also the prospects of a theatrical venture which is making a worth-while attempt to enable theatrical workers to develop their art under more favourable conditions than is generally possible in the English theatre.

Yours truly,

JOHN EARLE.

901, Collingwood House,
Dolphin Square, S.W.1.

LATEST WEST END RELEASES

"Tovarich," "Comedienne," and "Young Madame Conti" are the latest additions to the already extensive autumn list of West End releases controlled by Messrs. Samuel French. Other newly published plays from the same house include: "Shirley," "Agatha's Heaven," "Once Bitten—Twice Shy," "Murder Party," "Forced Landing"—each of which has a performing royalty ranging from two to three guineas.

Pinker's play Bureau has secured the amateur rights of Ronald Jeans' comedy-thriller, "Ghost for Sale," and, although the standard fee is five guineas, special concessions are allowed to societies performing in small halls.

PROPAGANDA IN THE THEATRE

By H. R. Lenormand

IT is, I believe, the wish of the English delegates* that propaganda in the theatre should have a place among our subjects for discussion. The French delegation has thought fit to make me the mouthpiece of its views on this matter.

At a time like this, when in every corner of the earth opposing ideologies confront us, there is a great temptation for governments and politicians to look upon our art as an auxiliary force to subdue and bend to its own purpose. It cannot be denied that the theatre exercises a powerful influence over the people. More effectively than books, articles in the press, pamphlets and speeches, it can engender enthusiasm, hatred, impassioned support for a set of ideas. The leaders of nations recognise the power it possesses to direct, to sway or overthrow. They know that the theatre can launch unexpected events; as at Brussels in 1830, when a performance of "La Muette de Portici" caused a revolution to break out. It is only too easy to awaken, by the presentation of imaginary happenings, racial or class hatred which will find instant expression in direct action. It is possible by special pleadings on the stage to demonstrate some political principle for which the adherence of the masses is sought. They are all too obedient to the influence of rhetoric in the theatre. Poetry, eloquence, burning defence, denouncement are certain of their effect.

The French delegation does not dispute the power of the stage to move and persuade, but it views with anxiety every attempt to place dramatic art at the service of a cause alien to its spirit. The wilful subordination of literature to politics, the use of the creative powers of an artist for definite ends—thus, I think, one can define propaganda in the theatre.

But the incompatibility between propaganda and the art of the drama is, in our opinion, a first axiom. We consider that to aim at proof and demonstration, to be pre-occupied with making some cause succeed, to defend and argue, spell death to a work of art. The artist who has an axe to grind may be compared to a lawyer developing his arguments. His work ceases to convey the living truth; it confuses actuality with error. And

it is then that its persuasive force is seen to grow less. Exactly so. Because if an author announces his intention of supporting some doctrine, he will awaken mistrust in unprejudiced minds, which will suspect him of throwing a tinge of bias over people and events in order to arrive at certain foregone conclusions. The theatre, so regimented, loses not only its artistic value but also, sometimes, its power to convince. Sometimes, not always. For there are good and bad lawyers; some of them are successful advocates, while others irritate or are simply ineffective. The most specious arguments can be persuasive and the most subtle ones destroy a case. So much for that. What we will not countenance is the absorption of the dramatist's creative power in pettifogging service, the transformation of the stage into the tribunal.

I know that objections can be raised to my statements. It is easy to answer back, "Wait a minute. Propaganda enters into the majority of great dramatic works. Did not Schiller in 'William Tell' make a defence of liberty? When Aristophanes wrote 'Peace,' was he not an ardent pacifist? And does not 'Polyeucte,' by Corneille, contain propaganda for Christianity? These facts are incontestable, and examples could be multiplied. Nearer to our own times, it can be maintained that the theatre of Ibsen, which so strongly contributed to the emancipation of modern woman, embodies arguments and pleading; that the plays of your great Bernard Shaw, who shook up the moral conscience of the average Englishman and brought about his spiritual freedom, and who also successfully laboured towards a change of values in his age—these are theatres of social propaganda. The American dramatist O'Neill, in that play of his which treats of the black population in the United States warned his countrymen against racial bias, and is, in effect, the champion of the coloured people."

How then can we establish a distinction between those elements of propaganda, some of which seem legitimate, nay, even essential, since they infuse the breath of life into the work which they inform, and those others which seem on the other hand to paralyse the plays, produce in them a kind of coldness, and to condemn them to decay and oblivion?

* At the International Theatre Congress, Stratford-upon-Avon, July, 1938.

PROPAGANDA IN THE THEATRE

The distinction is not perhaps so difficult to draw. In the theatre one very quickly realises what springs from the depths of a writer's soul, his true emotions, and what is written to order with the object of flattering authority, supporting a cause or governmental policy. We do not ask that a dramatist should cut himself off from his age: we do not wish that the theatre should become abstract or aloof; we do not believe in art for art's sake; we do not counsel indifference to ethics; but we refuse to see the writer for the theatre bowing to causes whispered in ministerial antechambers; we do not want to see him support and craftily justify the undertakings of those in power, or to pander to passions and illusions that are not his own but those of the leaders of the moment.

We find it desirable and proper that the dramatist should bear witness to his own times, either denouncing or praising them. But we want him to do so as an artist, as a free agent, answerable only to the dictates of his own hatred or enthusiasm; that he should be sufficiently aware of the dignity of his art to refuse to write a mere task.

I know that in states called "totalitarian" freedom of expression is so thwarted that the writer for the stage finds himself in this dilemma—to do what he is told or hold his peace. That being the case, we think that his honour as a writer will bid him keep quiet. If he cannot write at the prompting of his inspiration alone, he should learn the tragic nobility of silence. If he is a true artist, he will suffer less by laying down his pen than by using it in a manner foreign to his convictions. Dramatic art cannot become a public service, nor can it be ordered about. A writer is not a soldier, and if he is detailed for propaganda work he ought to have the courage to refuse it. At the present time, a time when every single man (and that includes the artist) struggles unhappily in the arms of destiny, even obedience is not always a guarantee of safety.

I know of one writer in Soviet Russia who faithfully carried out the tasks imposed on him. Yet to-day his works are banned and he himself is suspect. This man of whom I am thinking had, however, the justification of believing in his job. As a former workman in the Revolution his motives were disinterested. If he was asked to write in praise of Soviet youth or the Red Army, he carried out the task with sincerity and that is what

saved these works, which were conceived in accordance with pure political convention, from frigidity. But objectives change in totalitarian states. To-day, those which the said writer followed in 1933, are out of date. Very well. Would it not have been far better to have uttered his protest than to have meekly obeyed an authority which changes its views or reverses its opinions?

I think that in the long run the greatest writers escape from government persecution, whether their work has to be done outside the boundaries of their own country or whether it is reinstated later, provided that its value makes it an intrinsic part of the dramatic heritage of the nation. History teaches us that dramatic geniuses, even though thrown aside for a time, have in the end regained their niche in the temple of the nation's literature. The French classics of the seventeenth century were not omitted from the play-bill during the Revolution, and they are more often staged in democratic France to-day than they were under Louis XIV. In England, too, the persecution from the Puritans during the Protectorate and the disastrous Acts of Parliament of 1641 and 1648 procured for Elizabethan drama a signal and lasting comeback. In Soviet Russia, the aristocrats Pushkin and Turgenev, the religious Moussorgski have remained Gods of the theatre and music. I am convinced that Wedekind, Schnitzler, Werfel, Bruckner, who were once the glory of the modern German stage, will regain their prestige.

Such is roughly the attitude of the French delegation regarding propaganda in the theatre. We do not challenge the integrity of the dramatist who, having been won over to the tenets of a political party in his country, subscribes in his work to the principles of that party. But that his plays should lean to the Right or Left Wing, that they should embody a defence either of Conservatives or Revolutionaries, the very fact that they are "orientated" or biased makes them in our view suspect. From the moment when the partisan keeps step with the writer, the writer is in danger. We mistrust all such compliance, and we believe that the very life of dramatic art is intimately bound up with its independence.

We know that works called "tendencious," plays about current affairs and those which aimed at vindication have run through the



COSTUME DESIGN BY LISI WELLESZ FOR
HANDEL'S "CÆSAR AND CLEOPATRA."



Photo: Anne Lugt.

SCENE FROM "THE ROMANTIC AGE" BY
A. A. MILNE. A PASADENA PLAYBOX
PRODUCTION BY HERSHEL DOUGHERTY
BUPP.

PROPAGANDA IN THE THEATRE

ages. Those of Aristophanes, among others. We know that it is impossible to form a criterion of the value of a work from the universality of its subject, from its noble intentions, from the depth of its humanity, from the justice of its social purpose; we know that in the last resort, all depends on degree of creative power possessed by the writer. But we demand that this creative

power should remain unfettered, that it should fiercely resist all controlling influences, however innocent they may appear.

The theatre, as an art, concerns the community. But the first condition of dramatic creation is isolation for the writer—freedom of attitude and judgment in face of the actions of mankind.

STUDY YOUR MAKE-UPS

By Philip B. Barry

Author of "How to Succeed on the Stage"

ONE of the greatest mistakes of the amateur, and frequently of the professional actor, is the tendency to use traditional and conventional "make-ups." Of course, there are certain parts where originality of treatment in this direction is not desirable. For example, if you are playing a straight "juvenile," you cannot indulge in any unusual method. But in the majority of rôles, there is usually scope for thought and originality.

Let me take one or two concrete examples. Suppose that you are playing a very old man, seventy-five or eighty years of age. Now the traditional method is to employ the usual flesh tints for portraying "old skin," to sink in the eyes with lake or blue, to draw a network of lines on the forehead, to paint in furrows wherever possible, and so on. Now this is all very well in its way, but a really striking or impressing make-up will not always result.

What then should be done in this suppositious case? Avoid too much lining, and concentrate instead on a parchmenty complexion and on the sinking-in of the eyes. Immediately a novel effect will be gained, and the audience although ignorant of its inception, will see that something unusual has been done! Again, a novel touch may be introduced into the hair. Instead of allowing the white wig to be perfectly white, splash it here and there with a darker tint, brown or black.

Now for another case. You have to play a "comic" Frenchman. Well it is to be hoped that you will not dream of using the

old-fashioned traditional make-up of a black moustache and a small chinpiece. Frenchmen, to-day, usually shave as clean as Britons.

"Well, what am I to do?" asks the actor cast for the part. "How am I to get a striking make-up with a 'clean' face?"

Well, there is your nose! You can concentrate on that organ. Get some nose-paste and convert it into a mild edition of the "Cyrano de Bergerac" feature. Then, see to your eyebrows. A slight arching on the George Robey principle, though of course not so pronounced, will at once impart character and humour to the impersonation. Get a permanent grin into your mouth by painting the edges with upward lines of lake! The result, unless your face is entirely devoid of character (in which case you should not be cast for the part), will probably be exactly what you seek.

It will be seen that here again we have travelled right away from a traditional make-up. I will suggest one more case, and then make suggestions in another direction.

The third case deals with an original make-up for an elderly robust part. Perhaps I may be permitted to quote a personal reminiscence in this connection to illustrate my suggestions. Let us consider the part of "Thomas Greenleaf" in "Bird in Hand." When I played that rôle, I knew quite well that the "authorized" make-up would be one of three things—

- a. To be clean-shaven with a red face.
- b. To wear a greyish beard and whiskers.
- c. To have white hair and whiskers.

STUDY YOUR MAKE-UPS

I did none of these things. Instead, I made up "Greenleaf" with a brownish moustache streaked with grey, and a mottled complexion such as one frequently sees in elderly tavern-keepers. I emphasized my nose to make it more aquiline, because "Greenleaf" is a very aggressive character, and a small nose on such a man would be out of the picture. I powdered my hair, but only lightly, this suggesting a man who although quite old, was charged with vitality. The fact that some members of the Company congratulated me on my make-up proved that it had attracted attention. But really I deserved small credit, for I had copied it in every detail from the face of an old landlord of an inn, where I sometimes had a drink when I was playing in a South Coast town.

This brings me to my real text—that good make-ups should be drawn from life. A good place to study original make-up is the market square of a small agricultural town. Farmers, drovers, ostlers, all these people will provide suggestions. Take a note-book with you, and jot down the leading characteristics of any faces that interest you for stage purposes.

If you have a chance to attend police-courts, you will find there some excellent models. I got my make-up for "Sam Hackitt" in "The Ringer" from the dock of Bow Street Police Court. My make-up for the villainous anatomist in "Annie Green," which I played recently in the Oxford Repertory, was copied from the face of a venerable scoundrel seen years ago at Exeter Assizes. When I am in Town, I often spend a morning at the Law Courts, and have got many fine hints from the faces of judges, counsel and litigants. The advantages of these places over the streets lies in the fact that the "models" remain stationary. One has time, not only to jot down the salient features, but if one has any skill as a draughtsman, one can make a sketch as well. (N.B.—This must be done unobtrusively, as sketching in Courts is usually not encouraged by the authorities.)

Finally, there are the Picture Galleries. Go there and study the portraiture of Rembrandt, Velasquez, Van Dyck, Bellini, and other masters. See how they get their effects. It is true that grease-paint and canvas paint are very different mediums, but the fundamental principle is, in many respects, quite identical.

There is room in this article for only two

examples of famous portraits that may serve as models for make-ups. First, there is Bellini's "Doge of Venice" at the National Gallery. Here we have a very old man, with hardly a line in his face. How then is the age suggested? By the eyes, by the tints of the skin, and by a certain serenity rarely seen in youth or middle age. The second example is Rembrandt's "Jewish Rabbi," also at the National Gallery. This Hebrew is as unlike the traditional stage Jew as one can imagine. There is no hook nose—there is no long black beard. Nevertheless, the Oriental type is perfectly portrayed, by means of eyes, skin, mouth, expression, hair and ears.

It may be said that the counsels given in this little article are counsels of perfection, not to be easily followed by amateur actors, or even by their professional brothers. But no good work of art can be an easy thing. The player who takes his work seriously will derive deeper satisfaction from his performances if he goes on the stage feeling that he has not lazily accepted a traditional make-up, but has thought out matters for *himself*, and has founded his facial appearance on models that bear the stamp of reality and life.

LEWISHAM CHILDREN'S THEATRE GUILD

The Lewisham Children's Theatre Guild produced a most interesting pageant entitled "Groundlings' Delight" at the Town Hall, Lewisham, on October 25th. The pageant showed the Theatre and the Theatre-goer, through the centuries, in a series of episodes, devised by Mr. Harry Gell and performed by the children of the schools in the Lewisham district.

Each pageant was in two parts, the first showing the groundling of the period, and the second a scene from the drama of the time. We were taken from the times of Aeschylus by way of the medieval drama of the Village Green, the theatre of Shakespeare's day, when the performance was preceded by bear baiting in the pit, the age of Restoration Drama, with lords and ladies in fine clothes, orange girls, and beggars mingling at the entrance to the playhouse, to modern drama and the modern theatre queue, and finally to drama in the classroom, where the dramatization of a ballad showed what is now being done by school children in the course of their ordinary work. The scenery throughout had been painted by the children themselves, and the properties and costumes had all been made by them. The episodes were linked by a commentary spoken by a girl and a boy, representatives of two of the schools.

ABOUT THE DAVID LEWIS THEATRE

By Harold King

WHEN the executors of David Lewis erected their hotel and club building in Liverpool they included a concert hall in their plans. In course of time the function of this hall was extended. First it assumed a responsibility for providing entertainment for audiences drawn mainly from the very poor district in which the building is situated; afterwards it became also a centre for the local amateur dramatic movement, especially that side of it which combines social and dramatic aims. When, in 1912, Liverpool University Settlement was erected on an adjoining site, a most fruitful co-operation between Settlement and Theatre began. As a result of these developments the Theatre has been considerably altered. Its stage and equipment have been extended and improved beyond recognition; its seating reduced from 1,000 to 560 with much greater comfort; its dressing room and foyer space steadily extended.

In the past it has been the home of notable dramatic adventures. Outstanding were the "Tuesday night shows" which extended from 1908 until 1930 with a break during the war period. They were given by local amateur societies for the people of the neighbourhood. A flat rate of 2d. was charged, the Theatre taking the box office and assuming responsibility for royalties, scenery and small out-of-pocket expenses by the societies. From time to time productions were staged for embryonic societies whose resources would not allow them to take the risk of an independent public performance. More than one Liverpool society, now in a flourishing state, in this way owes its first chance to the David Lewis Theatre. Houses were generally crowded and Tuesday nights were a regular feature in neighbourhood life. The programme presented was catholic in the extreme, ranging from Shakespeare to Chekhov, Toller to Shaw, and Strindberg to Gilbert and Sullivan.

Another such adventure was Liverpool Repertory Opera, which between 1924 and 1930 produced 31 different operas, 9 first productions on any stage and 16 first productions in Liverpool, with an amateur caste working every night of the week and all day

on Sundays. Prices charged ranged from 3d. to 2/4. The crowded houses were half filled at every production by the dock labourers who are the main inhabitants of the district and who found no incongruity in 'a pint over the way' in the intervals of "The Immortal Hour." The venture was compared by sober critics to that of the Old Vic, to which, indeed, it had many likenesses.

These are examples of the past. Nowadays the work of the Theatre is no less closely associated with the neighbourhood and amateur drama in Liverpool; but the emphasis is different. Then, the idea was to persuade people to go to see plays; now the idea is to persuade them not only to watch but to act. The University Settlement has its own dramatic group including among its members not only some of the leading amateur actors of Liverpool but also men and women who first became acquainted with drama as members of one or other of the working men's and women's clubs attached to the Settlement. The clubs also have their own dramatic groups, and, taking the whole into consideration, there are usually productions of 4 or 5 full length plays and 10 or 12, sometimes more, one-act plays in the course of the season. That is, of course, in addition to the usual elocution and dramatic classes, play readings, lectures on plays and on various aspects of drama, and so forth. The whole forms a strong working dramatic unit. It is in addition an expression of the Settlement's idea of bringing together people of diverse social classes on terms of equality.

In addition Theatre and Settlement are in terms of close co-operation with various producing groups in Liverpool. Settlement officers are local officers of the British Drama League and the Festival for the Merseyside division is generally held in the David Lewis, while the Northern Area Final will also be held there next year. Festivals in the Theatre last year also included those of the Liverpool Boys' Association, Liverpool Union of Girls' Clubs and the Liverpool Federation of Men's Clubs. In each case, in addition to the Theatre providing a convenient centre, officers and staff of the David Lewis and Settlement have acted as organisers, committee members and sometimes as adjudicators.

For this is the key note: the David Lewis is not simply a hall available for hire; it is that, but it is also an organisation including people of considerable experience and talent and with a distinguished tradition. Its attitude towards those who perform on its stage, whether they are the best of Merseyside's societies or struggling groups just beginning, is always the same: the utmost effort to give to the production the greatest possible artistic finish. The Theatre is important because of itself; it is more important because of its connection with the Settlement and its devotion to club and similar work. It is most important of all as a centre of practical information, advice and assistance which has been a not inconsiderable factor in the development of amateur drama on Merseyside.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
INCORPORATING
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

President:
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council:
VISCOUNT ESHER

Director: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

Hon. Treasurer: ALEC L. REA.

MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 9, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

Telephone: EUSTON 2666.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Bournemouth Conference, which is reported elsewhere in this issue, proved a most enjoyable event, being opened by the Mayor of Bournemouth's Civic welcome and dance at the Pavilion on the Friday evening, and accompanied on the Saturday evening by a most excellent performance of "Sweet Aloes," by the Bournemouth Little Theatre Club. Everyone admired the charming Palace Court Theatre, which is the property of the Club, and the high standard of acting which was presented on the stage. The Conference concluded on the Sunday with a service in Bournemouth parish church, and a drive through the Hardy country in the afternoon followed by tea, again hospitably given by the Little Theatre Club. The principal discussions at the conference were concerned with the National Theatre and with the Little Theatres. There is no contradiction between these two movements. The National Theatre will rely on the interest of the same public which supports the Little Theatres, while they themselves should benefit in many ways by the dramatic impetus which the National Theatre will provide.

We much regret to record the death of Mr. E. A. Baughan, for so long the distinguished dramatic critic of the "Daily News." For some years Mr. Baughan was a member of the Drama League Council. His advice was always thoughtful and cogent. Four years ago Mr. Baughan was a member of the party organised by the British Drama League which visited the Moscow Theatre Festival, and his eagerness as a sightseer resulted in an indisposition which unfortunately left its mark on his health. Indefatigable both as a music, film and dramatic critic, his loss will be deeply regretted by the public and his friends.

We find that the edition printed of the Drama League diary for next year may not be large enough to fill the orders which are coming in for it to a greater extent than usual. Individuals and societies are therefore urged to apply for copies without delay so as to avoid disappointment, the *edition de luxe* in fact being already exhausted. The ordinary edition at 1s. is still, however, available. It is evident that next year we shall be well advised to order a larger number of copies.

The attention of members is called to the announcement of the Drama League meeting at the Conference of Educational Associations, to be held on Monday, January 2nd, at 5 p.m., at University College, Gower Street. We think that many of our readers are not alive to the interest of these meetings. In virtue of the League's affiliation to the Conference, our members will be admitted free not only to the Drama League meeting itself, but to the whole series of important gatherings held throughout the Conference.

Further School activities include a Three Day Course on Drama in the School, for teachers and producers of school plays, to be held from January 4th to 6th, at King's College of Household and Social Science, Campden Hill Road, London, W.8. Particulars may be had free on application to 9, Fitzroy Square.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"On the Frontier." By W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. Faber and Faber. 6s.
 "Charles Laughton and I." By Elsa Lanchester. Faber and Faber. 8s. 6d.
 "Oscar Wilde." By Boris Brasol. Williams and Norgate. 16s.
 "Acting for the Stage." By Sydney W. Carroll. Pitman. 6s.
 "Historical Costumes of England." By N. Bradfield. Harrap. 18s.

A NEW play by Mr. W. H. Auden and Mr. Christopher Isherwood now arouses considerable interest, especially since the remarkable "Ascent of F.6" captured the imagination of so many and such unlikely people. "On the Frontier," a melodrama in three acts for ten men and four women, and a chorus of five men and three women (who, we are told, *must* be able to sing) is even more topical than its predecessor. There is the same hatred of war, expressed in short, horrifying descriptions, the same ideal of eventual comradeship for all nations, but the theme is not so much the general frustrations and aspirations of humanity as (and most obviously) the immediate perils of the present situation. An insane and carefully manufactured "jealousy" leads to an absurd "incident" which precipitates two countries into a singularly ghastly war. Among the semi-marionettes who are caught in this dance of death are the hysterical and sick "Leader," the sardonic and remorseless industrialist Valerian (a brilliant study), and, most important of all, the two young people, Éria and Anna, belonging to the two countries at war, and drawn towards each other by a mystical bond which, when their bodies lie dead in hospital, enables them once more to meet in the spirit and deliver a message of hope to a tormented world. Much of the play is so fine, so moving and stirring that it seems ungrateful to say that it has not the haunting poetry or the strangely memorable atmosphere of "F.6." On the other hand, it has not the wilfully confusing quality which up to now has marked the work of these two writers; possibly, their political beliefs, so passionately held and so passionately stated, has forced them at last to a much needed clarity.

"A couple of ordinary people who try to get ordinary fun out of life," might seem an inadequate description of two people as well known as Charles Laughton and his wife, but Miss Elsa Lanchester, in her book, "Charles Laughton and I," maintains this unaffected viewpoint from the first, and the charm of her book is that we really feel we are watching the career of two human beings with the same struggles, the same hopes, love of feeble jokes, and moments of despair when things go wrong, as ourselves. The record is so engrossing that the close of the book comes as a shock; it seems unfair that we are no longer able to follow adventures which are still going on. Mr. Laughton in his introduction says "Reading this book has given me quite a turn," and we can believe this, for the pages are full of curiously penetrating observations—delivered however, with a simplicity which robs most of them of their sting. Both Mr. Laughton and his wife have "got on" (especially, of course, Mr. Laughton), but the book

is devoid of the aggressive conceit which we are assured is a prime necessity for success. On the contrary, there are some frank admissions of failure, and always there is the experienced artist's innate modesty, a modesty born of constant striving which tends to increase and become more complex with achievement. Although Miss Lanchester permits herself few definite judgements, the book has a fine irony sometimes which shows her point of view plainly enough—an example is the description of Hollywood's popular sport, all-in wrestling. Of Hollywood itself we get typical glimpses, as well as of many facets of stage and screen life. The uninitiated may wonder at the profoundly serious attention given to the problems of every-day make-up, but, in contrast, there are some amusing details of roughing it in a much loved country cottage. For all its hectic scenes the book is pervaded by a good deal of quiet happiness; a happiness born of what would seem to be a singularly successful partnership (only once do we read "For Mrs. Laughton the first night was an irritating experience, although perhaps it was a great moment for Miss Lanchester."), and it is this atmosphere of comradeship and the common-sense attitude towards the trials and triumphs of public life which gives the account its refreshing quality.

Mr. Boris Brasol, born in Russia in 1885 and now practising law in New York, has been a life-long student of Wilde, and in his book, "Oscar Wilde, the man—the artist," is every evidence of his close, sympathetic and exhaustive study of the subject. We follow the various stages of Wilde's career from childhood (and there are some illuminating remarks about the early influence of the home in Merriem Square) up to the tragic death in 1900. Mr. Brasol uses the wealth of material at hand with skill and a good sense of style, although we regret "hither and yon," and also the tendency to strike a note of doom rather frequently. In this review it is more suitable to discuss the sections dealing with Wilde's literary work, and here we cannot always share, although we may sympathise with, Mr. Brasol's enthusiasm. So much of Wilde's writings resemble an extraordinary curio shop, with all kinds of junk piled up in strange confusion and every object hotly scented with powerful Eastern perfumes. Despite the superb phrasing and often overwhelming atmosphere of his serious work, we think Wilde will be chiefly remembered for the series of delicious paradoxes and epigrams which no one took seriously except the unfortunate author—although he always denied doing so. But few will agree with Mr. Brasol that Wilde "stands universally recognised as one of the most glorious virtuosos of stagecraft." Wilde's stagecraft was very often at fault, except in his masterpiece, "The Importance of Being Earnest," and it is surprising to find that Mr. Brasol considers the most excellent of Wilde's plays is the stilted "An Ideal Husband." (Incidentally, not every one will agree, either, that the Epstein monument is "despicable and ugly.") The book, of course, is by no means only concerned with literary matters; it contains what we imagine is an unusually complete account of the tragedy of 1895, and the madness and stupidities of all kinds which preceded and caused the disaster.

RECENT BOOKS

"Acting for the Stage" by Mr. Sydney W. Carroll, is not so much a technical treatise, although such things as gesture, movement, timing, interpretation, and make-up are dutifully touched upon, as a species of genial sermon; the heart-to-heart talk of a man whose experiences have mellowed rather than hardened his views upon the art he deals with. Mr. Carroll, we think, would make a good writer of "Wayside Pulpits," and if some of his aphorisms tend to contradict each other, that is the fate of all proverbial wisdom. At times, the emotion of the moment appears slightly overwhelming; as when we are told that if you are a genius "you may even be hump-backed, weasel-eyed, pig-snouted, bandy-legged, dwarfed, deformed, with legs of unequal length, or teeth like tusks." Not content with this, lop ears, a bald head, a prognathous jaw, twisted lips, an enormous belly and a limping gait are quickly added. Later, a list of mental qualities is almost as impressive. The beginner is told that he needs (as indeed he does) plenty of nerve, power of attack, power of retention, control of body and mind, imagination, sensibility, judgement, clear diction, a sense of timing, a regard for variety, and a love of repose. "Throw in as well," cries Mr. Carroll, "beauty of figure and face, glory of voice, breadth of

movement, and subtlety of brain, and what critic can withstand the appeal?" Certainly few critics could withstand the appeal of this sympathetic, if somewhat rambling, dissertation on the dangers and possibilities of the actor's life and work—to which Mr. St. John Ervine contributes a pungent introduction.

Miss Nancy Bradfield, when assistant to Professor Osborne at the Royal College of Art, made pen-drawings of her many costume studies, and, adding necessary information as well as a frontispiece and title page, bound them into a book for her own use. This book is now published under the title of "Historical Costumes of England. From the eleventh to the twentieth century," with a short foreword by Mr. James Laver. It is a collection of delicately-executed drawings in two colours, and with each of the 68 plates is given a brief, detailed description of the main features governing the costumes depicted. Although the whole book possesses a certain charm, we found the drawings of the 1900 to 1936 styles among the more interesting (possibly because most books of this type stop short with a perceptible gasp the moment the period ceases to be "picturesque") and the least satisfactory the rather inadequate treatment of the superb Elizabethan dress and its accessories.

THE PASADENA PLAYBOX

By William Peery

CHARLES LAMB'S Bo-bo, son of the Chinese swine-herd, Hoti, is not the only man on record who by burning down his house discovered a tasty dish. The city of Pasadena, California, has a similar explorer in Mr. Gilmor Brown.

One of the largest and most successful Little Theatres in the United States, the Pasadena Playhouse depends for its financial support entirely upon public favour. Like almost every idealistic producer, Mr. Brown must many times have been torn, during his twenty-two years as its producing director, between the cries of his business office for box-office successes and the pleading of his genius for artistic triumphs. And though Playhouse productions have generally been relatively notable achievements, Mr. Brown still dreamed the dream of most worthy directors for a theatre "... devoted to bringing to lovers of the literary and unusual drama, the type of play which one may seldom see upon any stage."

The quotation is taken from an official announcement of Mr. Brown's now famous Playbox, in which this very resourceful director has taken advantage of the peculiarly

favourable combination of circumstances afforded by the West Coast: a large number of experienced actors, actresses, and playwrights who have been attracted to Hollywood and nearby cities, a goodly number of citizens informed about and appreciative of the theatre to make up the highly selective Playbox audience, and a small number of patrons who showed their friendship and interest by contributing to the small building fund which was required. Thus simultaneously with the Depression was founded what is certainly the littlest and, I believe, one of the more significant Little Theatres in this country.

Bo-bo, Lamb says, destroyed his home while indulging in his favourite sport, playing with fire; and Mr. Brown, it may be charged, founded his Playbox while engaged in the daring business of questioning the conventions of the stage. As Hoti's charred dwelling was to Bo-bo, so Mr. Brown's Playbox has become to the theatre. For what was begun as a search for the novel, an indulgence in the strange, ultimately made its worthwhile contribution to a venerable art.

Language, however useful a convention, sometimes becomes an obstacle, not an aid, to

THE PASADENA PLAYBOX

communication. And the language of the theatre—made artificial by the conventions of the box set, the proscenium arch, curtain and footlights, by the constant necessity of projecting voice and expression, is becoming somewhat irksome to American playwrights, actors, and audiences—a fact shown by the success here of such innovations as Mr. Paul Green's "Johnny Johnson and the Lost Colony," or Mr. Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." And the Playbox, which has remained Mr. Brown's personal project and pride, has played its part in the contemporary movement to liberate the theatre.

In fact, the Playbox is not, properly speaking, a theatre at all. It is a small frame structure half-hidden by trees and flowers between the Brown home and garage. Throughout it is marked by a most informal, homelike atmosphere, from the smile of Mlle. Jeanne Richert (a teacher in the Playhouse School of the Theatre and proud Playbox hostess) as she shows you to a comfortable armchair in a large comfortable living room, to the huge bouquets of the season's best cut garden flowers. Even veteran playgoers find no evidence that the friendly room will shortly be graced by a play. There is no stage; there are no curtains, footlights, or other theatrical gadgets. On one side of the room is a long stairway; on the other three, a step higher than the main floor, are shallow alcoves: but even in these approximations of stages the walls are of plaster, the mantels, doors, and windows of solid wood. There is nothing, save selective lighting, to separate audience from actors; for to the delight of the audience as well as the director, the action may be moved about the entire room.

As a result, the spectator feels different from the spectator in any other theatre. Never is he allowed to become conscious of the fact that he is witnessing a play. Here more than in any other theatre can the layman observe clearly the working of that principle of which directors are constantly speaking, empathy—the sympathetic projection of the spectator into the action, the sensory identification of audience with actor. The soft lights of the room go out; after a few seconds other lights come up, and one finds himself transported, not into a theatre to see a play, but into the centre of a portion of life. Playbox actors never create a character; they become him: and Playbox patrons share, not observe, his

drama. When the bill is Shaw's "The Admirable Bashville," we are fortunate enough to have ringside seats at the fight; and we watch Walpole's "The Old Ladies" descend the stairway into the room where we are sitting.

But what, it may be asked, does this do to an audience? Is it not highly confusing, and does it not destroy illusion? Playbox patrons do not think so. Illusion is created by the simple set for Milne's "The Romantic Age," shown below. And the set (if one may use that term) for "Emma," Dewitt Bodeen's adaptation of the Austen novel, suggests so well a room that has been lived in as to convince us, not that we are observing from what the draughtsman charmingly calls an "ideal" point an action of which we are not a part, but that we are there with Emma, who is one of us. The playbox method has intensified and revitalized the dramatic experience; and though its audience must remain limited to something under fifty persons, those fifty come away from Mr. Brown's back yard with something of Charles Lamb's own keen pleasure from the miracle which is good theatre.

THE STAGE SOCIETY

The Stage Society has had to alter the order of the first three plays announced this year. The first play of the Society's Fortieth Season to be done at the Wyndham's Theatre on Sunday, December 4th, will be "Paradise Lost" by Clifford Odets. This will be produced by Miss Stella Adler, producer and actor-member of the Group Theatre of New York, who played in the original production in 1935. The cast includes Noel Howlett, Barbara Couper, Alan Wheatley, George Benson, Julian Somers, Christopher Steele, and the designs for the scenery have been made by Mr. Hamish Wilson, designer at Glyndebourne.

The next two plays will be "Thunder and Rain" by Tsao Yu, a young Chinese author who writes in the Western convention, and "The Marriage of Blood," by the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, to be produced by Michel Saint-Denis with Edith Evans in a leading part.

THE "WIMPS" DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The "Wimps" Dramatic Society played to a very enthusiastic audience on the first night of their three performances of "Autumn Crocus" at the Rudolf Steiner Hall. The actors were well deserving of the praise they received, and it is no exaggeration to say that there is genuine talent amongst the members of this company. This was noticeable especially in one or two of the men who gave really excellent performances. The leading parts were admirably handled, and the rest of the cast lent intelligent support.

D. P.

THE BRITISH PUPPET GUILD

By Gerald Morice

SOME of the results of another year of puppet activity were seen at the 13th Annual Exhibition of the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild at Victory House, Leicester Place, Leicester Square, London, during the week of October 24th to 29th, 1938.

At the same time came the news that the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, "after a careful investigation of the aims of the Guild and its present financial condition, has decided to grant to the Guild £200 a year for two years to enable it to acquire new premises and to develop the work in which it is engaged. The Trustees wish it to be understood that the Guild will make every effort to build up an adequate income for the future."

As Mr. Walter Wilkinson, author of the "Peep Show" books writes in the introduction to the illustrated catalogue,

"The Guild is a University of the Small Theatre; it collates and disseminates historical and practical information. It has added a new subject to the school-room and throughout the country in schools of every class children are making small theatres, practising the delightful crafts of modelling, dress-designing, play-writing and production, speaking and singing, and receiving a gentle introduction to the theatre in general."

The Exhibition received brand new clothes; a simple layout was planned and executed. Large mural screens showed the various aspects of puppetry in this country. The standard of exhibits was much improved, and in the Small Hall schools' work was displayed. Boys and girls flocked to the shows which were given at hourly intervals throughout the day, and the total attendance cannot have been far short of 4,000 for the week.

Anglo-French co-operation was marked by the visit of a delegation from the National Puppet Federation of France, with, at the head their President, M. Justin Godart, former French Minister of Health and Labour, and present *Senateur du Rhône*.

Under the title, "Mr. Punch's French Cousins" they exhibited characteristic figures of the puppet theatres of some of the French provinces, thus—Lafleur, of Amiens, Jacques of Lille, Guignol, native of Lyons, but now for more than a century a Parisian puppet favourite. They played at the opening ceremony of the Exhibition, at which M. Corbin, the French Ambassador, was represented by M. le Comte

de Rose, Secretary at the Embassy, in addition to representatives of other Anglo-French organisations, a scene from the classic Guignol "pochade," "The Singing Peasant." Their number included M. Louis Pajot-Walton, of the French "dynasty" of puppeteers, who showed a puppet Grenadier, made over a century and a half ago by his great-grandfather in 1790, at the time that he was in Napoleon's army. The family Guentleur, which has had the puppet theatre in the Champs Elysées since 1818, also exhibited one of their treasures, a Polichinelle, contrived in 1838, and then weighing 12 kilo, but transformation and subsequent reduction have lessened this to 3 kilo, and it is now a glove puppet, having started life as a rod puppet. Since 1912 the Paris Polichinelle has not appeared in public.

Two important new puppet publications should be signalised.

First, "Puppets through America," by Mr. Wilkinson. The title speaks for itself. It is published by Messrs. Bles at 7s. 6d. And also, "Puppets and the Puppet Stage" ("The Studio," 7s. 6d. and 10s. 6d.) by Mr. C. W. Beaumont, historian of the ballet, who now turns his attention to another form of mime. The book contains 250 pictures of puppets, gathered from many European countries, and also from America. Mr. Beaumont's work complements "Dolls and Puppets," Herr von Boehn's standard history, and brings the matter right up to date.

I should add that the Puppet Exhibition, 1938, was informally opened by Miss Molly Sheldrake, aged fourteen, "the youngest Punch and Judy worker in the country."

MIME PLAY COMPETITION

The Institute of Mime announces a competition for the best original one-act Mime Play, to be divided into two classes: 1. Plays for Adults; 2. Plays for Children. A prize of £2 2 0 is offered in each class and the entrance fee is 2s. 6d. Manuscripts, which must be typed, should be sent to The Secretary, 20, Reynolds Close, Hampstead Way, N.W.11, not later than January 31st, 1939. If plays are intended to be performed to music, annotated music scripts must be submitted with scenarios. It is hoped to include suitable entries in a Book of Mime Plays.



"MR. PUNCH'S FRENCH COUSINS."

Some characteristic figures of the French Provinces. Extreme right, Polichinelle. In front, a troupe from Lyons. Hanging behind, puppets shown by Lafleur & Co., of Picardy. Photograph by Gerald Morice.



"DAISY DAISY," A MOMENT IN THE BALLET
"RECREATION UNDER FOUR QUEENS"
ARRANGED AND PRODUCED BY ANNY
BOALTH FOR THE Y.W.C.A. PERFORMANCE
IN THE PRESENCE OF H.M. THE QUEEN AT
SADLERS WELLS, NOV. 14TH, 1938.
Dresses by Richard Southern.

THE BOURNEMOUTH CONFERENCE

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Conference of the British Drama League at Bournemouth on Saturday, October 29th, 1938, at 10.30 a.m.
Present—Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth (in the Chair) and 84 members.

The Minutes of the last Conference at Cardiff were taken as read, and signed.

Welcome by the Mayor of Bournemouth.

The Conference was opened by the Mayor of Bournemouth, who said that he was glad to have the opportunity of welcoming a body which had done and was destined to do so much for the culture and entertainment life of the country. In 1919 the membership of the League stood at 100, to-day it was 4,000. This was a phenomenal growth, but when one considered the enormous interest that was now being taken in the theatre, both amateur and professional there was great scope and many opportunities in front of the League. England had a reputation for not responding to artistic demands in the way some of the continental countries did, but from the plays he had seen recently he was sure leeway was being made up. He concluded by wishing the delegates a successful Conference and a very hearty welcome to Bournemouth.

Mr. Alec L. Rea, the Hon. Treasurer of the League, who responded to the Mayor's welcome, said that he had attended Conferences all over the country for many years, but he did not think the League had ever had a more enjoyable reception than that given at Bournemouth. He congratulated Bournemouth on having a Little Theatre—a theatre of which even professionals were envious. Mr. Rea concluded by thanking the Mayor most cordially on behalf of the League for his reception to the Delegates both at the Pavilion the previous evening and for his kind speech of welcome at the Conference.

Chairman's Opening Remarks.

Before proceeding with the Business of the meeting, Mr. Whitworth stated that he wished to propose a vote of condolence to Lady Mond on the death of her husband. Sir Robert Mond was the first Hon. Treasurer of the League, and it was due to him that the League became possible. His donation of £200 was the capital on which the League started, and for this help, as well as his services as Treasurer during the early days of the League, he would always be grateful.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

Before calling on Mr. Sharman to move the first resolution, Mr. Whitworth said that the shortness of the Agenda was due to a large extent to the International Crisis having occurred just at the time when resolutions should have been coming in. He was glad that in spite of these difficulties so many members had been able to assemble at Bournemouth.

Proposed by Mr. George O. Sharman:—

"That this Conference welcomes the progress in the National Theatre Scheme, and calls upon all amateur dramatic societies to give it their full support."

Mr. Sharman said he wished to make it clear that this was no pious resolution. He believed the National Theatre was going to do much for amateurs, but whether amateurs or professionals, they were all committed to the principles for which the League stood,

and they believed in promoting the right relation between the art of the Drama and the life of the Community. The presence of the members at the Conference indicated that they all approved these principles, and it should follow naturally that they supported the National Theatre Scheme. In years gone by, Mr. Sharman said he had criticised the scheme because it did not go far enough—he wanted to see endowed theatres all over the country so that the people everywhere could have an opportunity of seeing the plays they wanted to see, and performed in a worthy manner. The present scheme did provide for this as it included tours throughout Great Britain. There were nearly 3,000 societies affiliated to the League. These represented many thousands of individuals who were the cream of lovers of the drama, and as they were the organised body likely to gain most from the National Theatre they should do their best to support it. It was not going to be just one London Theatre, but something very much more valuable to the country as a whole. Mr. Sharman suggested that delegates should interest their own societies, local Councillors and M.P.'s, and that they should give performances in aid of the Fund. On an average of 60 members for each of the 3,000 affiliated societies, if each member was responsible for the collection of 10s., that would realise the whole of the £90,000 wanted for the National Theatre.

In seconding the motion, Mr. Lewis Casson said the choice of the site of the National Theatre was a valuable symbol of the point that the theatre had deliberately separated itself from the West End because it did not propose to compete with the amusement industry. For the broad distinction one could make between the aims of the National Theatre and those of the West End theatre was that the latter is interested in selling successes more strictly than in putting on a play for its own intrinsic merit. He looked upon the National Theatre as a machine for making an economic proposition of putting over plays solely for their artistic merits.

If they were to organise a theatre for the absolute purpose of putting on plays chosen for their own artistic merit, and try to develop such a theatre until it was an economic proposition, he thought it had a fair chance of success.

It must be a flexible theatre, not a theatre depending on the play which was going to run six weeks, but one which could put on any play that was worth doing.

Mr. Casson said that to have a repertory theatre it would be necessary to have a permanent company and it was a question which would have to be considered in relation to the drawing power of the actors; and a somewhat doubtful point, whether a company could be made a "star."

It would have to establish a tradition of the theatre; and it would need at least a year to get going and to establish that tradition; so that there should be no thought at first about touring. It could be the centre of a touring organisation later; and a most important side of this would be foreign tours.

"We believe," said Mr. Casson, "that Britain stands for a particular attitude of life, for a particular form of a sense of humour, and a particular generosity about all the problems of the world. It seems to me that the

THE BOURNEMOUTH CONFERENCE

theatre should be the finest expression of these qualities."

Speaking of the tradition of acting, Mr. Casson said the West End theatre was incapable of establishing any form of tradition because companies were assembled and disbanded afterwards. In regard to actual speaking on the stage there was no time to be given to this subject nowadays, as everything was done in such a rush, it had to be taken for granted.

Real life speech was getting duller, and as the result, so was it on the stage. The B.B.C. announcer was a typically dull English speaker. Nobody was trying to get back to the beauty and the tune and music there was in English speech; and nothing could really achieve this except a permanent company which was striving above all things to restore the beauty of the English language.

"We have got our speech so dull," he continued, "that we dare not put on a play in Elizabethan costume because it would be so absurd. Talking as they do nowadays, it is so impossible that we have to dress them in modern dress."

Mr. J. Wilton Anstey enthusiastically supported the motion, and said the National Theatre should in time bring about a renaissance in the National literature.

Mr. Herbert Marshall (Unity Theatre, London) said that his theatre heartily approved of the National Theatre. He had worked in Russia where all the theatres were national. A high standard was only achieved by the theatre which had no care for to-morrow. He hoped that when it was established, the National Theatre would not forget its debt to the amateurs and allow them to play in it once a year.

Mr. Emmet (The Questors, Ealing) said that one of the great advantages of a National Theatre would be that it would set a standard which would be a stimulus to other theatres in general. He supported the scheme rather more in hope than in confidence. So much depended on the practical working out of the scheme. There was the question of Direction. Success would depend on one man. No one knew who he would be nor if he could be found.

Mr. Emmet suggested that £100 might be raised by B.D.L. members to endow a seat in the name of the League.

Mr. Bushill-Matthews (Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation) supported the resolution. He pointed out the great debt owed to the Professional Theatre by amateurs, and he thought that unless the theatre received the same recognition as that accorded to other Arts there was no future for the Amateur movement.

Mr. Rea said that the National Theatre as described by Mr. Casson, was a Counsel of Perfection and there was grave danger of the fostering of a tradition of acting turning out to be just the encouragement of old-fashioned acting. Were distinguished actors to be philanthropists and play for small salaries just for the kudos of the National Theatre? If full salaries were to be paid, a subsidy would be needed. He echoed Mr. Emmet's enquiry "Where is the super-man as Director?" Mr. Casson's scheme was an ideal which would never be achieved.

Mr. Heaven (Portsmouth Players) reported that his Society had subscribed £2 2 0 and would give more if their balance sheet permitted.

After Mr. Sharman had replied to the criticisms, the resolution was put to the vote and was carried with four dissentients.

Before adjourning the Conference for lunch, the Chairman read a telegram just received from Miss Elsie Fogerty wishing success to the Conference and to the National Theatre Resolution.

AFTERNOON SESSION.

Proposed by Mr. John Fernald :-

"That in view of the growth of the Little Theatre Movement, the League should provide further facilities for its development."

Mr. Fernald said that the Little Theatre movement was very important for the Art of the Theatre as a whole. Fewer and fewer people were going to the theatre. The reason was largely economic, but the theatre had largely lost its hold on the younger generation. Those who were intelligent and had not abandoned dramatic art took their art from the screen, and they got something out of the screen because there was not the same barrier of the footlights between the actor and the audience. Much that was wrong with the professional theatre to-day had to do with the fact that performances for the most part took place on large stages, which did not permit of drawing distinction between showmanship and true expression. In a Little Theatre one could act in much the same way as in a Film Studio. One need not worry about "getting an effect over." He believed that the great count to the menace of the Pictures lay in the Little Theatre Movement.

Mr. Emmet in seconding the motion, thanked Mr. Fernald for his able exposition of his cause which was a most valuable contribution to the Conference. Mr. Emmet said he was in favour of the organisation of a Little Theatre Group within the B.D.L. He reported that a Conference of Little Theatre representatives had recently been called by the League, and they had come to the conclusion that the League could be of considerable help. Their first problem was to define "A Little Theatre" and the following definition had been approved:

"For the purpose of this Group the term 'Little Theatre' shall be deemed to apply to any approved organisation which has for its main purpose the public or private presentation of a regular programme of stage plays in a theatre of small capacity or other building owned or leased by or on behalf of such organisation and principally used for such stage plays."

It was thought that the League could help by circulating information, reports, programmes, etc., and by holding conferences of Little Theatres from time to time to discuss artistic problems peculiar to themselves.

Mr. C. B. Purdom attacked Mr. Fernald's theory which he thought was a plea for the destruction of the Drama. Film acting was not acting at all. Mr. Fernald was pleading for what was the enemy of the theatre at the present time. The theatre of the day was despising its own technique and that was why people did not go to the theatre. What was wrong with amateurs was that there was not enough acting. The amateur movement had achieved progress only in mechanical appliances and in costume and there had been little or no improvement in the standard of acting. The traditional success of the theatre was in "getting the play over" to the audience. This could not be done in Little Theatres, but in those theatres where real drama was the inspiration of the theatre.

Mr. Lingard (Stockport Garrick Society) said he thought Mr. Purdom's argument was pure nonsense,

THE BOURNEMOUTH CONFERENCE

and he referred to "Mr. Samson" the play for an intimate theatre produced by Mr. Purdom, which had won the Howard de Walden Cup in England and the David Belasco Cup in America.

Mr. Herbert Marshall supported the resolution. He said that the Unity Theatre wanted to know more about the work of other Little Theatres, and nothing but good could result from co-operation and interchange of experiences.

Mr. Angus Wilson said that some plays which were subtle were suitable for small theatres, but there were other plays of a different type, which could only be produced with effect in large theatres, and both sizes were needed in the dramatic world.

Mr. Lewis Casson said that by confining oneself to the Little Theatre, one limited oneself to the type of acting which would be done better in the film. The effect of the theatre should be comparable to that of an orator on a huge crowd. That was lost in a Little Theatre. It was impossible to move an audience in a Little Theatre to a great emotion. Just as we were losing the great orator, so we were losing the great actor. It was a mistake to think the Little Theatre could take the place of great rhetorical acting.

Mr. John Bourne (Temple Bard Players) supported Mr. Purdom. He thought that most of the B.D.L. members were hard workers, but they were not representative of the great majority of amateurs. He had seen the work of 6,000 societies and 90% was definitely bad.

Mr. Bushill-Matthews supported the resolution, but not on account of Mr. Fernald's argument. He thought that small theatres were an economic necessity. It was the aim of most ambitious societies to acquire their own theatre, and large theatres were usually beyond their power to build and also too expensive to keep going. He thought that an organisation within the membership of the League to assist the work of the Little Theatre might be invaluable.

Mr. Leslie Goodwin (Bournemouth Little Theatre Club) said they had found it necessary to change the name of the Little Theatre to the Palace Court Theatre because the public felt that the word "Little" meant smallness, and professional actors were averse to playing in a Little Theatre. He would like the Drama League to find a better name for the proposed group.

Mr. John Fernald in replying to his critics denied that there was no obligation to be "natural" when acting in a Little Theatre. Furthermore, many plays were meant for small theatres such as those by Tchekhov, Molière's comedies etc. He also referred to the performances of the Compagnie des Quinze which would not have achieved anything like the same effect in a large theatre.

The Resolution, on being put to the vote, was carried without contradiction.

Proposed by Gerrards Cross Players Club:—

"That Divisional Festivals shall not be held under the auspices of the same Club in consecutive years."

In speaking to the motion, Mrs. Alan Parker said that in her district the Festival was every year held in the same Hall and the arrangements were made by the same team. While not in any way implying that there had been local friction or unfairness, she thought it would be better for all concerned if the Festival could sometimes be held in another Hall and organised by another team.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Francis Kelly.

Mr. Barber said he thought the wording of the motion was wrong, as Festivals were never held under the auspices of Clubs. He opposed the motion.

After some discussion, Mrs. Alan Parker agreed to withdraw the motion, on the understanding that the problem should be referred to the Central Festival Committee.

Place of 1939 Conference.

Mr. Whitworth read a letter from Mr. Bushill-Matthews who, on behalf of the Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation, invited the League to hold its 1939 Conference in Birmingham. This was seconded by Mr. Barber, and accepted unanimously.

The Conference ended with a hearty vote of thanks to the Bournemouth Little Theatre Club for the use of their room and for their generous hospitality during the Conference.

PROJECTED SCENERY

An interesting production of Hans Schlumberg's famous play, "Miracle at Verdun" was staged recently at the Tavistock Little Theatre, London, W.C.1. The play presents considerable difficulties particularly in a little theatre where the number and diversity of its scenes combined with the very large cast raise many problems. The Producer, Mr. Leonard T. Crainford, is to be congratulated on his most effective solution of the difficulties involved.

A permanent curtain and rostrum setting was used the very simplicity of which greatly enhanced an excellent production. Set at an angle, and occupying almost the whole floor space, it consisted merely of a series of shallow steps, alternately wide and narrow. No scenery as such was used, but an interesting experiment in this direction was made by the use of slides, representing the background of the scene, projected on to the backcloth from a lantern on a perch to one side of the proscenium arch. The backcloth was placed at a slight angle to avoid distortion of the slides, and to overcome the difficulty liable to be caused by the casting of shadows on the backcloth from the lantern, the rostrums were set at a deeper angle in the opposite direction, thus leaving as a "dead area" only a small triangular space between the rostrums and the backcloth.

The slides were the work of Mr. Donald Hull who has made several experiments in the use of this medium. In this production they proved most successful, and in view of the obvious advantages, it remains to be seen whether more extensive use will be made of them. In this instance, the black and white negatives were used to tone with the general scheme, but Mr. Hull has also used coloured slides with equal success.

Among the many excellent performances, those of the resurrected soldiers stood out in particular. If it was at times apparent that further rehearsal would have helped to smooth some rather ragged edges and pull the play together more as a whole, it must also be said that thorough and careful production were evident throughout.

KAY GARDNER,
Tavistock Little Theatre.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

STOCKPORT GARRICK SOCIETY

THE Stockport Garrick Society was founded in 1901, and owes much of its ultimate success to the experimental policy adopted by the members—particularly in the “finding” of new plays. The latest was the first production on any stage of “The Lovers of Gudrun” by F. L. Lucas, the poet, novelist and essayist, and Lecturer in English at King’s College, Cambridge.

The play deals with the Icelandic saga of Kiartan and Gudrun, and the false friendship of Bodli, with the advent of Christianity into Iceland as a background. Although always interesting, there are few moments of greatness, but enough opportunities to test the ability and resources of any society.

The author says, “I wrote the play before going to Iceland. In my experience it is often better to trust first to one’s imagination; let reality check it afterwards. In this case the reality proved very like, and almost as exciting. I saw the homesteads of Kiartan and of Gudrun, and the place of Kiartan’s killing, and their two graves at Borg and on Holyfell, with the black mountain range of Snæfellsnes lying for ever like a jagged sword between them.”

The play has five acts and an epilogue. True, many of the acts are little more than scenes, but I found small excuse for the epilogue. We see Gudrun some twenty years after the telling of the story, a nun on Holyfell. The only possible reason I could find for this was that the author wished to offer a contrast between the earlier family blood-feuds, and the completeness of a bloodless Christian conquest on the individual; and possibly to point a moral to the growing spirit of rival nationalism throughout the world to-day.

By one of those curious paradoxical twists, the epilogue provided the most beautiful line of the evening—“while gulls wheel white over Holyfell”—but on the whole I was disappointed with the dialogue. It was a distinct shock, for example, to hear such phrases as “old wives’ tale” “den of footpads” and “good luck” which savour of Arnold Bennett, the Bow Street Runners, and the take-off for a record-breaking flight all served on the same dish.

The acting was up to the usual high standard of the Garrick, and the settings, if they gave us nothing new, were workmanlike and sound, convincing and pleasing to the eye. These were executed by the author’s wife, Prudence Lucas, the well-known sculptor and potter.

So many amateurs stumble over the vexed business of “falling” correctly, that it was a pleasant experience to watch an evidently well-rehearsed company. Tempers were soon frayed, and sword-blades glittering, but be it death or glory, the result was always convincing, and weapons were sheathed with that satisfied air that real business had been done. I missed the sight of our old friend the battle-axe. Did these giants of a past age find no use for the weapon with which Harold slew his namesake, the King of Norway?

It is interesting to note that throughout the summer months, the Stockport Garrick searched for new plays. The verdict of the Society, after reading scores of manuscripts, is that new playwrights are uninspired, for— with very few and rare exceptions—the plays submitted were but pale reflections of familiar West-End successes.

Mr. Jepson, the editor of the Society’s magazine said, “There have been the same sets of characters;

the same pseudo-smart backchat, spiced with labouring epigrams; and the same type of settings have recurred time and time again. Such plays as exhibited competency—and there were not more than half a dozen—lost any chance they might have had of production, by reason of their commonplace and undistinguished themes and imitative plots. It seems fairly obvious that amateurs who write plays imagine that the surest way to success is to imitate already established success. Slavish imitation, even if successful, can only lead to deterioration of the drama.

“If amateurs would rid themselves of the idea that to aim at West End managers is the primary need of a playwright, they might possibly attain production elsewhere. It would save much disheartening experience if new writers would first provide plays for repertory companies and amateurs, bearing in mind the need for small casts, easily adapted settings, and original themes.”

The Society’s own Little Theatre—“The Garrick” seats approximately 350 people. Unfortunately the stage is rather cramped, and this was emphasised at times during “The Lovers of Gudrun” which has a total cast of eighteen.

J. R.

BABER REPERTORY COMPANY

“Liliom,” Molnar’s masterpiece, was given a welcome revival by the Baber Repertory Co. at the Twentieth Century Theatre, W. on November 9th. Although the difficulties attending six scene-changes were not always overcome, in other respects the performance was highly commendable.

The play deals in realistic manner with the downward career of a circus-hand from idleness to brutality, crime and suicide, thereafter deserting realism to show the suicide’s examination and sentence by a celestial court of his own earthly imagination and a vain attempt at expiation.

Gentleness and brutality combined were well conveyed by Joseph Pleat as the circus-hand Liliom. His playing, together with that of Esther Lawrence as the devoted kitchen-maid, brought moments of rare and simple beauty (well preserved in Benjamin Glazer’s English text) to relieve the tale’s sordid nature. There were several good supporting performances, those of Betty Moutrie, Norman Eades and Joseph Victor being outstanding.

FREDERICK BENNETT.

PILGRIM PLAYERS

The first of two performances of “Passing Brompton Road,” by Jevan Brandon-Thomas, was given last night in the Y.M.C.A. Theatre Hall, South St. Andrew Street, Edinburgh, by the Pilgrim Players. The light-hearted comedy provided pleasant entertainment for a large audience, and revealed an unusually high standard of aptitude and technical capacity in the players. The company gave the right response to the half-serious motives of the play, which deals with the aspirations of a scatter-brained resident in Brompton Road to enter “society” by way of a divorce. The play was produced by Jean Belfrage.

H

ured
real
com-
tion-
tion.
abel
ious
urent
ceas.
d to

that
of a
ction
peri-
for
minal
and

ick."
the
ed at
nas s

R.

en a
t the
9th.
anges
the

ward
tality,
show
lestial
empt

well
liom.
nce as
rate
azer's
There
ose of
ictor

TTT.

mpton
night
Street,
carted
large
ard of
The
erious
ons of
enter
was

ST. PANCRAS PEOPLE'S THEATRE

Charrington Street, Crowndale Road, N.W.1

TEL.: EUSTON 1769

Under the Direction of EDITH NEVILLE, O.B.E.
Producer and Manager PHYLLIS KINDERSLEY

DECEMBER PERFORMANCES, 1938

Evenings at 8.0 p.m.

1st, 2nd and 3rd
The Wind and the Rain Merton Hodge

8th, 9th and 10th
Dick Whittington Margaret Carter

10th
Matinée at 3 p.m.

Reserved Seats: Numbered, 2/6. Unnumbered, 1/6.
Admission 7d.

Transferable Ticket for the same seat for the ten plays,
2/6 seat 15/-. 1/6 seat 12/6, 7d. seat 5/-. .

Special Play Production Course, including classes in Acting,
Stage Department, Make-up, etc.

Vacancies for men and women of experience
and ability for Amateur Repertory Company.

Send stamp for prospectus to:

The Business Manager, St. Pancras People's Theatre,
Ltd., at the above address. Interviews by appointment.

THE COMING OF SIMON EVAL

3 Acts — 2 Scenes — 6M., 4F.

"Effectively Boris" Stage
"A Modern Morality Play" Catholic Times
"A Companion to 'The Passing of
The Third Floor Back.'" Northern Echo

This play has been translated into Welsh, and
Typescript copies are now available.

Typescript 2/6 post free from:

JAMES B. PINKER & SON,
Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.2

LITTLE THEATRE, CITIZEN HOUSE, BATH AND EVERYMAN THEATRE, HAMPSTEAD, N.W.3

New Year Course of Art of Acting and Play Production,
Everyman Theatre, Hampstead, December 30th to January
8th. Thoroughly practical Course held in actual Theatre under
professional producers. Scenery, Costumes, Lighting, Mime
and Make-up Demonstrations. Acting parts guaranteed.
Public performances. Evening Theatre visits. Inclusive Fee,
Three Guineas.

Sunday Course of Art of Acting now running, Everyman
Theatre, Hampstead. Membership available any time.
Acting Parts guaranteed. Public performances.

Beautiful Stage Costumes, all periods, since, Curtains,
Scenery, Properties, available on loan at inexpensive rates.

Dramatic Library containing every published play.
Annual Subscription 1/- for which any number of books may be
borrowed. Free Advisory Bureau.

For particulars apply Hon. Sec., Little Theatre, Citizen
House, Bath, enclosing stamped envelope.

TWO EVENING PRACTICE CLASSES

in

PRODUCTION and ACTING

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS

DECEMBER 7th and 14th, 1938

7.45 to 10.15 p.m. at

The British Drama League, 9, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

(Telephone: EUSTON 3666)

(1 minute Warren Street Station)

STAFF:

Course A. 7.45 p.m. Production:

Mr. JOHN BURRELL

(Of the London Theatre Studio)

Course B. 9.15 p.m.

Acting:

Miss FRANCES MACKENZIE

(Of the British Drama League)

Further particulars may be had on application to the Schools' Organizer

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

Please mention "Drama" when replying to Advertisements.

CHAS. H. FOX LTD.

Theatrical Costumiers & Wig Makers

ESTABLISHED OVER 40 YEARS

COSTUMES AND WIGS ON HIRE

FOR ALL OPERAS, DRAMATIC PLAYS, PAGEANTS, ETC.

Write for Estimates to

184 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.1.

Telegrams: Theatricals, Westcent, London.

Telephone: Holborn 9557-9.

TWENTIETH CENTURY THEATRE

WESTBOURNE GROVE, W.11

Bus Routes: 15 and 52 pass the Theatre. 7, 27, 28, 34, 46
cross Westbourne Grove near the Theatre.

Station: NOTTING HILL GATE (C.L. & Met. Rlys.)

Theatre available for:—**DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES, REHEARSALS, CONCERTS,
ORCHESTRA PRACTICES, LANTERN LECTURES, MEETINGS, etc.,**
also **LARGE HALL**, suitable for Bazaars, Receptions, etc.

**RE-DECORATED INSIDE AND OUT. GOOD LIGHTING EFFECTS.
GOOD HEATING. GOOD DRESSING ROOM ACCOMMODATION. (H. & C. WATER.)
ACOUSTICS EXCELLENT.**

Apply: **THE SECRETARY (Park 6470)**
OUR CHARGES ARE INCLUSIVE.

Parking for Cars.
NO EXTRAS.

PLAYS

and

BOOKS

OBTAINABLE AT SHORTEST NOTICE

from

**THE BRITISH DRAMA
LEAGUE BOOKSHOP**

Phone: Euston 2666

"The Perfect Marriage"

A Comedy Duologue

By **LEONARD WHITE**

1M. 1F.

30 mins.

Simple Interior.

As played at the London Coliseum and
other West End and provincial theatres, and
broadcast from the following countries:

ENGLAND (*Empire and National Programmes*
28th JUNE, 1938)

**Ireland, South Africa, New Zealand,
Australia, Ceylon, France, Austria, Hun-
gary, Finland, Sweden, Holland, Poland
and Czechoslovakia.**

Earmarked for production from Egypt and other countries.

THE DUOLOGUE OF UNIVERSAL APPEAL

Amateur Fee: 10s. 6d.

Copies, 1/1 post free, from B.D.L. Bookshop, or from
the publishers:

GOWANS & GRAY, LTD.,
58, Cadogan Street, Glasgow.

